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Linguistic Landscape of the City of Krasnoyarsk

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to determine some categorical issues of the statement on universal links, mutual interdependence and holistic nature of linguistic phenomena and social processes. Under the scope of closer observation is linguistic landscape of the Siberian city of Krasnoyarsk. The topical issue lies within a global theme “Language and Society”, which reveals social character of development and functional use of languages. From the qualitative research perspective, the paper examines resident’s self-reported emotions and visual perceptions of the linguistic landscape. The study implies results from contributive efforts of multidisciplinary approach to analysis of urban settings.

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1. Introduction

Scholars from many areas are tempting to exhibit systematic description of linguistic profiles of present-day cities. It should be mentioned that the so-called “Linguistic landscape” has recently developed as a zone of cooperation among a wider spectrum of specialists. Sociolinguists, involved into studies of interdependence of all kinds of social and linguistic phenomena paid attention to the fact that public spaces are marked by linguistically formulated symbols, which relate to many social, economic, political and cultural grounds (Ben-Rafael et al., 2006; Shoamy & Gorter, 2008).

Generally speaking, the attempt to address varied topical issues may be justified by understanding that the theory and modern methodology of linguistic landscape cannot be put into a certain and elaborated paradigm. Scholars

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argue that there is no universal concept-base inventory, which could support coordinated study of this specific-related issue.

From the diachronic perspective, the studies of the Russian sociolinguist B. Larin on dialectal profile of the city and its social groups of population (Project team “Language of the city” worked at the History of Arts Institute as early as in 1926-1931), then studies of the Chicago School of urban sociology (1920-1930), and to some extent, the research works of W. Labov (1960s), the founder of the American sociolinguistics, contributed into understanding of differentiation between codes of meaning construction by various social strata of the city population. The resulting statement of previous studies evidenced that “spaces are constructed not just through the objects and boundaries that surround us and the habitual ways we conceive of them, but also through interaction with others operating in the “same” space” (Ben-Rafael, Shoamy & Barni, 2010: xiv).

Thus, one of the definitions of linguistic landscape, under which the above-mentioned scholars assume linguistic objects that mark public spaces with tokens, includes “any written sign found outside private homes, from road signs to names of streets, shops and schools. The study of linguistic landscapes focuses on analyzing these items according to the language utilized, their relative saliency, syntactic or semantic aspects. These language facts which landmark the public space are social facts that, as such, relate to more general social phenomena” (Ibid.: xiv). It is understood, that further development of linguistic landscape will depend on consolidated contribution of different disciplinary areas. Their common understanding of linguistic landscape as symbolic frame of public spaces motivated us to look at the city of Krasnoyarsk as a relevant social environment domiciled by people who live there and those who work there as advertising agents, designers of all kinds, investors and sponsors, local authorities, entrepreneurs and shop owners. We can therefore argue that linguistic landscape is a kind of a crossroad of professional and social interests.

2. Methodology

The research questions identified aims to investigate the students’ assessment of the city linguistic image, which conveys both semantic meanings and syntactic aspects.

Along with evaluation research, the study was developed as a sampling of the linguistic landscape discursive power and its symbolic role, which comes into play. We identified the research aim: to depict an evaluation of the elicited material and immaterial objects marked with linguistic tokens. In the classroom within the Business English course, we informed twenty undergraduate students of the Institute of Economics, Management and Environmental Studies of the Siberian Federal University, located in the city of Krasnoyarsk, about the main aim, objectives and procedure of the study. The selected students completed answering the questions and discussed the topicality of the investigation and their first impressions and assumptions. They also studied material on brand names and their symbolic meanings. Having got a set of the detailed instructions, the students started collecting data.

Through semi-structured interviews, the qualitative data from the students/experts were researched and assessed later.

3. Discussion of results

As we have already defined, our narrow focus of research dealt with commercially centered public spaces overloaded with linguistic tokens. Thus, we were addressing our particular interest of research to the most popular downtown, business areas, and spots of entertainment in the city of Krasnoyarsk. Being a center of commercial and entertaining activities, Krasnoyarsk depicts a vivid interaction of business people, local authorities, and its population via vibrant and contemporary messages. According to the students’ understanding, linguistic landscape reflects attitude of the city of Krasnoyarsk as a part of activity of a global financial arena and countless innovative achievements.

They argued that a generic image of every single city worldwide could be presented metaphorically in a form of a reservoir full of human resources, their professionally induced competences and skills. Under contemporary globalized environment, a large amount of languages inhabit in the metropolitan cities. Both a state language, which is an official means of communication within the area in question, and the English language, which is a proud owner

of its functional role nowadays worldwide, canvas a consumerist approach to the use of language combinations. The students of the Institute of Economics, Management and Environmental Studies think of themselves as consumers and a part of the city where they live and study. To their understanding, the linguistic landscape of Krasnoyarsk is very much commercialized under globalized cosmopolitan trends.

It is sufficient to have a look at the brand names of commercial spots in the central parts of Krasnoyarsk and other public spaces.

There are:

Restaurant-hotel complexes: Hilton Garden Inn Krasnoyarsk, Sky hotel, Soft_Hotel, AMAKS,B & B Hostel, Miniotel24, Kras Apartment Service, Carlson, Weekend;

Food stores: Just Food, Al Pacino, Sushi-San, Krasdragon, CupCake, Sweet home, Big sushi & Roll, Lucky Luciano;

Fast-food shops and restaurants: Burger King, Star Kebab, MyWOK, French Dogs, KrasPanda, KFC, Mama Roma, People's, Crystal, Chef Italiano, Chikki-pizza, Big Yorker, Quick Love Burger, Subway; Yoga-Bar, Hesburger, Franky Woo, Harley's, Broaster, BURGERS MEXICAN FOOD, Ibiza, T.G.I. Friday;

Bars: Buddha Lounge Bar, My favourite PUB×RESTAURANT×BAR MUNCHEN, NEW YORK (1+1 DRINK & FUN) 24 OPEN, Music bar loft, Rock Juzz Café, Bookmaker pub (sport pub), Sally O'Briens, Riverbar BALKON, Harat's pub, Bak\$, lucky pub, KILLFISH DISCOUNT BAR, MAXito, L-city, Black Pearl;

Coffee shops and coffee houses: Traveler's Coffee, Coffeeline Espresso bar, GREENHOUSE – coffee shop, Mike&Molly – café-bar;

Hair studios and barber's shops, beauty/spa/massage salons: Mods' hair Paris, Hair City, Elixir, BOOST-Up, Bad Boys Barbeshop, Chop-chop, Concept Store & Barbershop, Unique, GOLDWELL, Personal city, Infinity, Art & Beauty, Wonderfil, Relax, Keit & Leo, Matrix;

Fashion studios: Celebrity Lounge, Caramel, Rich, Beauty Time, Bliss, New Star;

Institutes of beauty: Babor, Maxim, Ultra, Radiance, Sun Street, Devine, In Style, Fantasy;

Fitness centers: Body Balance, Body Fly, FatAway, Sport & beauty;

Premium class stores: Emporio Armani, Hugo Boss, Marina Rinaldi, Karen Millen, Lady & Gentleman City, Sobranie, Trussardi;

Sportware: Nike, Adidas;

Mass market menswear, womenswear brands: Sysley,Guess, Bershka, Calzedonia, Intimissimi, Wisel, Gizia, Circle Boutique, Zara, Benethon, Mexx, Mango, Promod, Top Shop, Orsay,Wool Street.

As everyone can judge, all above-mentioned public spaces spotlight brand names in English and other lesser used languages (Italian/French). The latter ones are not at a closer investigation in this paper. All these commercial quarters of the city exhibit consumption opportunities for passers-by, generally speaking, and for the younger generation, in particular. All names sound quite sweet for them, because they are written in English and they have a symbolic meaning: these public places welcome new comers, people of all ages and genders, who are ready to consume new offers, pay for new impressions, taste new gastronomic combinations, indulge themselves to buy trendy clothes and shoe ware, entertain and have fun.

Personal preferences, new fashion look, new local style, borrowings from foreign languages, more often from English, impact dramatically the linguistic landscape of the city of Krasnoyarsk. On the one hand, such a broken traditional linguistic environment could damage people's perception. On the other hand, the city and its young and active inhabitants keep going well in a new set of rules. They seem to accommodate easily chunky information, and get oriented in all those massive embodiments of concepts and emblems that had been earlier alien for their parents and grandparents. Within the frames of culture-consumerist context, its players / students pay equal attention to comfortable environment, premium class consumer goods, and prestige, i.e. they are gradually becoming accustomed to the particular culture codes.

This is how metacognitive mechanisms work when proceeding linguistic reality, which people were not familiar with before. Following O. Breidbach and J. Jost, E. Shoamy and E. Ben-Rafael, we fully support their idea that "linguistic landscape represents by itself a gestalt, one whole, un ensemble (in French)" (Breidbach & Jost, 2006; Ben-Rafael, Shoamy, Barni, 2010: xvi).

According to axiomatic remarks of the scholars, one can anticipate that field researches can shed light to better understanding contextualized linguistic image of modern cities in different parts of the world. We believe that we can apply basic theoretical and methodological approaches to the analysis of particular linguistic manifestations and their intertwined correlations with principles of linguistic ecological environment of the Siberian cities.

It will be also intriguing to reveal how much linguistic emblematic signs add decorative fleur to the Russian / Siberian cities. Firstly, urban Russian younger population shows readiness and loyalty to adopt this new linguistic code. Holistic picture of contemporary urban settings visualizes inner mechanism, which drives the city and its life from the point of view of the global village. It encompasses all possible types of consumer goods, human experience and professional activities. Linguistic and constructivist structure of the social context aims at providing comforting ambience for the city population and developing its day-to-day culture.

Due to a wide scope of values, mindsets and cognitive differences of those young people who had interpreted linguistic landscape images, their axiological reactions towards linguistic landscape displays turned to be versatile. Previously identified hypothesis was - the more diversified were linguistic signs, the wider would be the youngster's emotional replies to them.

It was worth investigating how visual perception of public spaces' linguistic decorations correlated to emotional perception of brand names of the high street shops, as well as restaurants, recreational areas entitled in English. A thorough data evaluation after interactive interview between an interviewer and respondents served a basis of qualitative research that reflected dynamic process of understanding the meanings of the names.

4. Conclusion

Sociologists of language turned to get interested in discursive means of linguistic landscape. Linguistic illustrations stem from varieties of resources reflecting a myriad of cultural, social, political and economic circumstances. In the light of the findings, we can say that the delivered research reflects accommodation of the young generations' visual perception to their emotional responses to linguistic landscape of the city.

We should take into consideration one more factor. Krasnoyarsk is a monolingual city. At first glance, it is not open to language contacts at all. On the contrary, due to the marketing revolution, linguistic landscape of Krasnoyarsk is far from being trivial: popular zones of commercial activity play with the symbols of multicultural economic environment. Ironically, English is on the front stage of the linguistic portraying and decorating residential and commercial facades. This fact goes against the linguistic management strategies of the Russian population. Its intrinsic immunity to foreign languages in general, and to English, in particular, does not save the city of Krasnoyarsk of the worldwide geopolitical trends.

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